MY
COMING
OF
AGE
I.B. ISKOV

My Coming of Age

by

I.B. Iskov

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My Coming of Age

The Best of an Ongoing Collection
of a Life Expressed in Poetry
by
I.B. Iskov

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For Larry

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What Plantos Meant to Poets Trapped Within Socio-Economic Boundaries

Questions? Honest discourse?
While the world was on fire,
the ashes cried out
“Let me be remembered.”
Each roasted marshmallow passage
the true souvenir.

Existentialism? Fatal attraction?
While the sun fried eggs on sidewalks,
the ants whimpered
“Aardvarks are taking over.”
Every miniscule tantrum
the new socialism.

Politics? Cooking lessons?
While pork and cigarettes were smoked,
the middle-class whispered
“A little wine is enough.”
White flour spread
a bare hypothesis.

Rejuvenation? World class beer?
While the madness of society unspoke grey,
swarms of charcoal birds chattered muteness.
Invisible writing
across the sky.

Transfiguration? Poetry for the working class?
While inventive hands laid bridges,
feminists sang
“So long, so long.”
Every argument ended
like a love affair.

Poet to Poet anthology, Guernica Editions, 2012

From My Window

Midnight motions gifts throughout the heavens.
Countless diamonds glitter constellations.

In sleepless star fancies, I dance
in the center,
overlook the late November spring.

With the taste of chiffon in my eyes
I constitute wisdom of being a virgin.

The cry of an infant sprouts somewhere.

Jasmine and saffron linger in the fire.

My breathing burns all night.

I love the starry asphalt.
Witness frail promises blossom clover-crowns.

Behold! I am a princess on the evening's throne.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010
Judge's Choice Award, *The Sparkle and Shine* Poetry Chapbook Anthology Contest, 2014.

Rumour Has It

I am addicted to decaf coffee
and newspaper rooms where
I pour over the print
for proper digestion of the news,
though in these terrorist days
every good story proves volatile.

Rumour has it I work
on the median behind the traffic sign
buried under history books
with compatible companions
sticking to their cell phones.

We discover repetition
at our feet – Hitler and the ISIS
with equal disgust.

Moving from the grey matter
of fact to a bomb shelter
on the lakefront covered with black cloth
would keep me from staying home;
but this is no dry run.
I return at moonrise
and wash up on a sheltered beach.

My collaborators believe I hold the pencil
like a knife,
but they only whisper the reality:
any woman climbing on her knees
is never at a loss for words
and should be held responsible
for the gossip.

It is my custom to venture out
in the wilderness,
set myself on a mad course to organize
nouns and verbs and egg shells;
maybe even broken glass.

But I don't fantasize a happy solution.
Jews and dogs and good Christian children
are all susceptible to the same fate.
Brute creation demands this.
Ask any executioner holding a gun.

Skirting The Edge, IOWI, 2015
Honourable Mention Award, *Canadian Stories Magazine* poetry contest, 2015.

The Trucker on the 401

Roadie in red shirt, black hat, yellow
teeth and fingers
rides the lane
noisy rollicking steamroller
will not be swayed.

Sashays down the highway
flicking sardonic ashes
under exalted wheels
with savoir faire.

Pulls away
my thoughts trail
smoke and exhaust
rise in chorus
sing to the cumbrous sawhorse
cutting up the road.

In the common calamity of road rage,
hurled rocks, guns and hunting knives,
the trucker on the 401
rolled up
shirtsleeves and windows
continues to drive with reckless abandon.

Henry's Creature: Poems and Stories on the automobile anthology, Black Moss Press, 2000.

Pretentious Portrayals

The fullest expression of spirit must be judged as an article of customs rather than as a work of art. The equivalent of a souvenir bourgeois portrait is never humbled in a timeless house. When sunlight enters the room remarkably, a breath of intimacy bathes the face in its warmth, vaulting the portrait to new heights.
One feels helpless in a frozen state, admiring the work in the full atmosphere at a glance. The play of light allows the figure to come to life, whether birthed through the window or next to a burning candle or lamp. When the figure is half-turned, a precarious notion of mystique is aroused. This pretentious portrayal strips the picture of intimacy, even though tarnished views bring notoriety and infamy to the artist.
After a hundred years have passed, the happiness the artist attempted to capture on the face turns stiff and stern, and even though it is aristocratic, joy is still displayed by the proud owner of the portrait. Thus, the collector, too, becomes pretentious, portraying an art critic without any scruples.

Skirting the Edge, IOWI, 2015
Third Prize, *The Picture Perfect* Poetry
Chapbook Anthology Contest, 2015.

The Sex of Art

To understand any sexual figurine, one needs to undress quickly, stand on a wooden platform and think only of the Renaissance. By making use of nude bodies in picturesque portrayals, political opinions stray from the scene and become the pinnacle of pre-mature porn. However, large breasts and buttocks need no hype. Anyone with a vivid imagination will deliberate, then finally masturbate inside the hallowed canvas. Biblical, mythological and psychological traumas resulted from missing arms and heads; those models worked shorter shifts. The most prolific sexual heroes display anatomically correct genitalia: the classic peep show in realism. Polaroid polarities are developed when various vicarious virgins separate the painter from the saint and imagine voyeurism as neo-classicism in ten seconds. The very frisky fresco is restored by loving hands. Flesh and blood are recreated by arrangement. When sex is placed high above an ancient palette, you know it is time to visit your local art gallery and witness moments of ecstasy on purely naked walls.

Skirting the Edge, IOWI, 2015
Honourable Mention Award, *The Picture Perfect* Poetry Chapbook Anthology Contest, 2015.

Orgasmic Gourmet

Food is like sex:

Once you
experience
good cuisine

you simply can't get
enough

Crave It Writers and Artists Do Food anthology,
Red Claw Press, 2011.

Chronic Cough

In my spackled syndrome,
there is no poetry.
Life is stutter, a chopping hush.

Mysteries coagulate into heart-stopping blurs.
I gasp for breath and choke,

grow smaller
in my throat,
scared scarred.

I wish for a good night's sleep
without the dog barking
inside my chest.

No matter how many times I swallow
codeine, candies, pride,
I am constantly groping for air,
voice threadbare and shrunk.

The long slow burn of a thousand phrases
caught in one brief hard cough.
Thoughts grown spackled, cold
though I'm covered with blankets.

Judge's Choice Award, *Clean As a Whistle*
Chapbook Anthology Contest, 2015.
In A Wintered Nest, Serengeti Press, 2013.

Personal Complexities

Late at night,
I slowly dissolve
in the darkness
close my eyes
before evaporating
in a frightful fairy tale.

The mechanics of slumber
burrow through channels.

Loose memories dig up old songs
sung in another life.

I repose in my fortress of silence,
give myself unconditional love,
cradle insomnia like a colicky infant
and hug and rock myself to sleep.

Judge's Choice Award, *Clean As a Whistle* Chapbook Anthology Contest, 2015.

Glass House

Sunlight falls on dusty shelves.
One silver goblet begs for shine.

Candlesticks, erect as sentries,
guard the precious paradise.

I open my cabinet doors,
rearrange familiar figurines,

hide what's missing,
chipped or broke.

I care for moments,
dust them off, display them
on little easels.

I'm composed.

In A Wintered Nest, Serengeti Press, 2013
EnCompass 11 anthology, Beret Days Press, 2013.

Complicated Suffering

Beyond charcoal and wax,
in the dead-end weather,
paralyzed reflections melt
frames of holes.

I pretend grandeur
under blurry blue
standing defiant
in hunched clay.

Like the child with a slingshot,
I mean to kill the beast,
a great deadening thrill
beneath the chained bulb.

I want to find the opposite,
in the hidden ground
notice what arrives
and start a squabble.

I could be the noisy intruder,
a giant among spiders,
expose shocks of wires
to enlighten you.

Runner Up, *The Arborealis* Prize
for Poetry, 2008.

Wringer Washer Warranty

(an acrostic poem)

When I was a child, mother
Routinely did laundry with a wringer washer.
I would always help carry the
Newly cleaned shirts, sheets, underwear and other
Garments to the clothesline,
Eager to help attach the clothes pins, then later,
Run through the sweet-smelling, fluffy towels on tip-toes.

While mother washed the laundry, I
Always enjoyed watching the rollers
Squeeze out the excess water, and our
Habiliments always felt and smelled so good,
Each item always clean and bright,
Radiance released using a minimum of

Water, a minimum of detergent,
And in a minimum of time. This
Remarkable piece of machinery has
Reappeared, and can be procured
Anytime, by ordering one from Saudi Arabia. This
Necessary appliance puts sparkle and shine back into
Trousers, blouses, pajamas, cottons, linens, and
You only need to pay $889.00 plus $175.00 delivery.

Judge's Choice Award, *Clean As a Whistle*
Chapbook Anthology Contest, 2015.

Concrete Caution

A whole city of night
sprouts arms in all directions.

In the private landscape
stark and windswept,
hidden, light surfaces.

With the certainty of gravity
slices of sound
signal blue velvet,
anchor my senses.

I float in the gray cradle
with a feeling of lightness;
as if my shadow could breathe,
I am free.

My feet follow long shades of caution.
This craving for connection,
this desire for shine
rises with the sun,
transports my dream into the concrete.

In my noisy neighbourhood
I want to believe in *something*,
trace the curve of clouds,
scratch beneath their surface,
fly beyond my vision,
be a daylight star.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010
Honourable Mention award, *William Henry Drummond* Poetry Contest, 2006.

Cheap Love

People ask me where to buy stuff cheap.
They think I know how to get things wholesale.

I remember the last time
I worked the streets in high heels
for something cheap to love;
sauntered store to store
with my big purse,

looking, bending, stretching my neck
to read the sales tags in the windows.

At the corner of Queen and Jarvis
promiscuous sales signs beckoned;
but after checking out the goods,
discovered they were all talk and no action.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.
Honourable Mention Award,
Open Heart 1 Poetry Contest, 2007.

Lucy and Desi

Two lambs create the comedy:
both brave and afraid,
    bold and timid,
    naughty and shy,
    craving adoration.

Their condition nonsensical,
they do not question anything:
not the chickens
not the turkeys
not the dog
not the cat
not Martin.

Plain and crude, the butt of all jokes,
Lucy and Desi romp across the lawn
while Martin entertains guests
in his backyard
at his brand new outdoor swimming pool.

With thawed-out deer meat in the oven,
Martin casually mentions,
while petting their bleating heads,
Lucy and Desi will become lamb chops
in only a few short months.
.
Martin disappears for a few moments
to check on his fattened chickens and turkeys
and famous sheep
while the sun burns a hole through a cloud
and through my aching heart.

Honourable Mention Award, *Open Heart 3*
Poetry Contest, 2009.

Raising Chickens with a Gun

On a sunny summer morning,
Martin gazes out his country window,
watches deer pose tenderly on fresh grass.
It's as if they could read the
"No Hunting" sign on the wooden gate.

"All Mine, All Mine," mumbles Martin.
He decides it's time to get a gun,
rationalizes by stating:
"We're overrun with deer.
They'll harm the environment."

Meanwhile, up the dirt road,
bulldozers gouge vulnerable greenery,
uproot stately trees,
make way for condos.

Back at Martin's,
chickens peck and peep nervously.
There is no scarecrow, no rooster
and no gunman to protect them
from the circling hawks.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.
Runner Up Award, *The Arborealis* Prize For Poetry,
The Ontario Poetry Society, 2008.

Creativity

Across the linoleum
a mouth wrenches wide;
evocative grammar
loved like a bride.

Meandering, bluely quiet,
the secret a blush;
tender words gather
in a long, slow hush.

Bright ideas percolate
inside my busy head;
a star in a mental galaxy
rests on grey-matter bed.

Majestic, gleaming aloe jewels
sparkle alone on a page;
deep opinions elapse full force,
fan a poet's inured rage.

One single, solitary breath
unfolds like an aloe leaf;
lands in a shadow passage,
dispelling all disbelief.

Honourable Mention Award,
The Winsome Words Poetry
Contest, 2006.

To Rhyme or Not To Rhyme

Whether to rhyme or not to rhyme,
good composition takes some time.
All the poems I adore
always include metaphor.

Poems are small trees that bloom
inside the mind. There's lots of room
to plant good poems in your heart.
After all, they are a work of art.

Poems are flowers pressed inside a book.
Their beauty admired with just one look.
Poems are sun rays and birds that sing.
They are practically everything.

Gifts of words are placed in verses.
Songs of love, blessings and curses.
There are many ways to write an ode.
It's one way to ease a load.

Whether to rhyme or not to rhyme,
poems are a quality way to spend time
either reading or writing them on a page.
You could perform yours on a stage.

Honourable Mention Award, *Your Choice, Rhyme or Free Verse* Poetry Contest, 2011.

Autumn's Grandeur

When the sun breaks open the blue,
a flame dances through clouds
in frosty dawning
birds blossom outside my window
little by little the day slowly thaws.

Trees let loose their coloured garments,
empty pockets of rain.
Emerald puddles sparkle
through the wind's reflection
in the cool of morning.

Rain-smell arrives with the wind.
Warm water-beads cascade,
adorn October's fading green blanket.
In the wide yellow light
squirrels scamper loose
and blow across the fence.

All summer was heat
in steaming reflections
warm beads of sweat imitated the rain,
pretended to nourish grass and birds,
found shade in tired branches.

I cannot measure the size of sky,
blue beyond the light.
Above pale clouds, soaring geese
in a line, one by one
move under the weight of the sun
through Heaven's water barrels.

When the whole day is washed clean
and trees paint their gowns yellow,
the autumn sunset will radiate history
among barren fields and skyscrapers,
then lazily burrow under the stars.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.
Runner Up, *Voices Israel*, 2009.

Doomsday Sage

When voices run fast
succumbing to a stark night
it is not *what* they say

and *what* I can
over and over.
The echo is a rare occurrence.

When the wind whistles
on deserted streets
nature gives another speech.

I see golden songs
shine with intelligent fire
nebulous in fog.

In periods of silence,
I sense inevitable misfortune,
swallow void.

Hours violate the Earth,
spill air loose like marbles,
scatter the ominous.

The front page of my paper
screams injustice and cruelty
explodes on my doorstep.

Terror is the invasion of peace,
sways on shell-shocked streets.
Haphazard human hurricane of doom.

In a splash, I fade into white,
live days in advance
just one side of Heaven.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.
Runner Up, *Voices Israel*, 2008.

Indecision

Today I'm alone.
Humor prevails.
I mumble to myself.
Hanker for
a fire, a flood, a brilliant flash.

Here I am with an urge.
Fingers are quick like tongues,
assertive, restless
immense tributary
meandering across my lap,
rushes over the keyboard.

I croon to subliminal technology,
punctuated with sound.
It isn't the music that distracts.
The noise of my own contradictions
crouches behind the door.

I can't make out the words.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.
Runner Up, *Ascent Aspirations*
Anthology *One* contest, 2005.

Before The Flood

Once, when the earth was young
and Eden just a garden,
the names of clouds were only a sigh.

Once, when the smallest shiver
wafted through autumn,
a fashion statement resonated in basic green.

Once, when no shame and life
were contained in a breath,
each moment ignited in a glimpse
between mouths full of fruit.

Once, while everything still
was fresh and naïve,
the twilight brimmed a rainbow
of benevolence and gold.

Once, when my man was just a boy
and terror a horror movie,
each peace protest from a flower child
sang a new era.

Once, when buildings were giants among men
and the telephone a dynamic lifeline,
gentle shadows hushed a tableaux of fury
between flightless flora and fauna.

Once, when beasts were confined to zoo cages
and communism the perfect enemy,
rain-soaked and dramatic
iron fear curtained a new born question.

Once, when snakes could walk the earth
and apples promised wisdom in a bite,
the air harnessed
a rhapsody of fire.

Runner Up, *Voices Israel* 2008 Anthology.

The Beatles at Maple Leaf Gardens
~ Toronto, Ontario, September 7, 1964

It did not matter
what they performed
in matching grey suits
like business men
negotiating notes
in the din of thousands
of crazy-in-love-teenage-girls.

I didn't want that night to end.
The thrill of John, Paul and George
bending back and forth,
strumming guitars
with Ringo in the background,
long hair swaying from side to side,
briskly banging the drums
to the back-beat of my heart.

My childhood ended then and there.

Suffering pangs of unrequited love
like an ignored wallflower,
I cried my fourteen-year-old eyes out
wishing it was my hand they wanted to hold
knowing I would never, ever, ever
get to meet them.

Window Fishing The Night We Caught Beatlemania
anthology, Hidden Brook Press, 2014.

My Coming of Age

The Beatles belonged to me
in my coming of age.
It was a freer time
even though the Viet Nam war was raging,
even though there was unrest in the Middle East,
even though my parents were constantly fighting,
I had my Beatles record
to keep me safe and happy
when they sang *All You Need Is Love.*

John, Paul, George and Ringo were all in love with me
in my coming of age.
It was a new time
even though psychedelic drugs were a problem,
even though organized crime was very organized,
even though I was failing math and geography,
I had my Beatles record
to assure me the world was a wonderful place
when they sang *Strawberry Fields Forever.*

Every song by The Beatles was my favourite
in my coming of age.
It was a happy time
even though civil rights leaders were assassinated,
even though racism and anti-Semitism were strong,
even though I was made to feel like a pariah at school,
I had my Beatles music
to make me feel wanted and cared about
when they sang *I Need You.*

The Beatles were my closest friends
in my coming of age.
It was a flowery time
even though the threat of nuclear war hung over our heads,
even though there was mass murder world wide,
even though bullies threw stones at me
after school every day because of my lazy eye,
I had my Beatles to comfort and love me
every time they sang *Something.*

Window Fishing The Night We Caught Beatlemania anthology,
Hidden Brook Press, 2014.

The Superstitious Moon

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the mouth.
Undiscovered peaks
and smooth valleys
inhabited space
reminiscent
of all that vents,
in a sky wide-sighing.

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the brain.
The core of the universe,
past, present and future,
imprecise
and distinctly different
personalities and routines,
a meteor in flight.

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the belly.
Tides echoed in a voice
from a world I've never known,
still linked, still bonding
like a love song
crooned again and again,
retracing ocean views,
in gusts of wind,
unscathed without stars.

.

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the organs of reproduction.
Rifts and lumps
in the land of the photo
men claimed their stake
smiling inside plastic bubbles.
Square and sturdy astronauts
embraced the moon,
made love through telescopes,
birthed new places
in uncharted seas

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the left eye of the male
and the right eye of the female.
Compulsiveness and subservience,
difficult eye to eye contact,
superficial mirror images
render mysterious observations,
intimidate language
luminous collapsing,
with diversity in movement,
the metaphorical dance
is invented by elliptical forces
constantly revolving
because a moving object is harder to find.

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the female liver.
For once, not inferior
like gold on the meadow,
a brand new deep harmony
in our solar system,
orbiting inside its own milky way.
Molecules and foreign substances
open like a starburst,
leap from red to bright yellow.
An army of light
thrilling
further and further
into the dark.
Bridges the rift
between then and now
in a continual flow.

The most ancient astrological doctrine stated
the moon governed the left side of the body.
Wrapped in mists
beyond faraway alien worlds,
infinity divided the body in half,
trampled on loose ashes,
stood in the rain
amongst wind-blown theories
splashed on light.
After a ten hour spell,
the left side
alone in the dark,
misunderstood and ostracized,
hangs on the tip
anxiously governed by mankind.

Judge's Choice Award, *The Epic Proportions* Poetry Contest, 2017. *Skirting the Edge*, IOWI, 2015. *Earth to Moon* Vaughan Poets Circle anthology, Hidden Brook Press, 2009.

When the Dead Do Not Depart

They live in towers and basements
preserved by chill and shadow

and if they sleep
they sleep with one eye open
and dream of life after death.

They watch the world in silence
between doorways and mountains
consuming their own passion
digesting the sights and sounds of the living.

They are never lonely in their aloneness
their invisible solitude flourishes under a godless sky
waiting for history to happen
without passing judgment
without passing through.

They sacrifice time in a self-made ghetto.
There is no escape from their prismatic prison.
Doors only lead them into darkness
enticing no warmth, no comfort.

They continuously search for truth
knowing their death was premature,
knowing their haunting is important,
wanting to change the mundane
bring light to their (non)existence
and somehow make an undisclosed difference.

They are too lithe to disappear.
They move quickly and colourless
around the house
huge in the breeze
laying down roots that shiver.

Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010. First Prize,
The Price Is Right Poetry Contest, $2 Category, 2004.

With No Sympathy

The sun hunts me down
like a trained dog
burrows into my pillow
sniffs me out
from under the covers
drags my shivering body
from my bed
to the mercy of an impatient morning.

First Prize, *The Ultra Short Poem* Competition, 2015.

Ode to my Computer

Shall I compare thee to a typewriter?
Thou art more modern and user friendly.
The laptop model so much lighter,
With Internet options, O so trendy.

If I express the wonder of your style,
Some would say, *This poet lies.*
Technology's infections are vile.
When systems crash, hackers I despise.

But when your mother-board is restored,
You are my true pencil, my crafty pen.
Your sweet skill of saving on disk, adored.
No Selectric can match your acumen.

As long as I breathe, with mind to compose,
I have reason to compare thee to a rose.

Honourable Mention Award,
The Poet and The PC Poetry Contest, 2003.

Pamela for Mayor

Sitting on the floor
clutching Toronto's City Hall,
chubby fingers tumble
water and snowflakes
on a hot July afternoon.

Dark brown eyes sparkle
under chestnut curls.

A wide cherubic smile
and rosy pink cheeks
treasure the round glass
snow globe.

Runner Up, *The Arborealis*
Prize for Poetry, 2014.

What Moves Me

The old song.
Pink dawn.
Shivers up my spine.

Standing in the vault of night
holding my breath
so as not to cough.

The hats I wear
to unlock dreams.
Coming home

to clear the table,
unpack mazes
and chains.

The concrete tunnel
long and light,
straight to another melody.

Runner Up, Niagara Canadian
Authors Ass'n. *The Saving Banister*
Poetry anthology, Vol. 28, 2013.

What is a Jew

I wear a veneer of skin.
This does not transpire at birth
but rather in the dark chapter of time
when the sun glowers without heat
and despair descends like hail
covering hope, leaving an impasse.

I no longer expect tolerance
when I prepare latkes,
light my Shabbat candles
and pray for peace and goodwill.

My clothes are curtains
concealing subtle innuendos
locked inside rooms of memory.
Sometimes, my fingers part flimsy fabric
and another offensive event occurs.

There are synonyms used
to describe a Jew.
I collect and fold them
inside newsprint
and buried in a deep hole
in my heart.

Passover Literary Supplement,
the Canadian Jewish News, 2017.

All Smiles Are Rainbows

We have had two thousand years
to stumble and lean
squawk great cries
detached and horrible
clamor for attention
carry on like a hyena
then retreat to the corner
with a quiet that could be taken for patience

We have had two thousand years
in the cold
behind the fence
fixed under the cover of cloud
in troubled silence
to worry about the clinging terrors
of everyday life
in a landscape that could be taken for paradise

We have had two thousand years
to point broken fingers
in the summer heaviness
spin anger
spew up air furious
meet triumph in the gutter
wait for sun and light
from a window that could be taken for vision

We have had two thousand years
to sing like thunder
dissolve chaos
touch into wholeness
bind hearts together
fill the air with promise
spirit commitment resilience
in peace that could be taken for a miracle

Witness anthology of poetry, Serengeti Press, 2004.
Scarlet Thistles – A Canadian Poetry Anthology, Beret Days Press, 2014.

The Jewish Side of the Poem

The composition is gathered
like freshly cut flowers.

A too-pretty bouquet
admired a short time
bewitching before wilting.

I press dried phrases of pink and beige
between the stanzas
to make the poem flat
punctuation must be clean and germane.

Solitary thoughts are clipped,
thorns have no fragrance.

Sometimes the words tumble,
mock their own arrangement
and mouth the vase.

It's a human-interest thing.
In the rush of the poem,
I pluck the burgeoning words,
arrange brittle petals in pots,
display my Jewish side.

Sapphire Seasons, Aelous House,
2010 & *Skirting the Edge*, IOWI, 2015.
Runner Up, *Ascent Aspirations*
Anthology Five contest, 2008.

Be On Guard

Someone scrawled
a large SWASTIKA
while the world blew up
and the tired eyes of saints
filigreed –
gagged scared.

The moon swings like a hammock
repeats strangled rage
burning tomorrow's pain
step-by-step.

Don't lower your eyes,
don't cross
anyone in an over-sized sweatshirt
toppling Jewish tombstones
muttering Mein Kampf in prayer,
don't cross
to the other side.
Fierce heat
bright like morning sun
blinds internally
cruel and hard.

.

Move slowly
pebble by pebble.
Count the feet of your oppressors.
Invisible barriers of indifference
constructed in the mind
whisper protests when there is
standing room only for dissidents.

Hire a bodyguard
big and black and muscular
with arms
bearing a tattooed Cross
as big as a SWASTIKA.
Strategically place him at the front door
of your temple.

Runner Up, *Ascent Aspirations*
Anthology Eight contest, 2010.
Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.
Skirting the Edge, IOWI, 2015.

Hunting Season

I went hunting for a heart,
wrote about problems
always the reflection
of stark-naked yearning
for the long things in life.

I went hunting for a moral
in a crowd of smothered stars
knowing it takes time
to surrender misgivings.

I went hunting for inclusion,
discovered ignorance carousing
in green pastures.

I went hunting for a promise,
climbed stairwells and ladders,
searched for language unspoken,
on a brilliant slivered afternoon,
witnessed the death of conversation.

I went hunting for an answer,
crouched over problems,
magnified issues,
made the meaning of obscurity even smaller.

I went hunting for acceptance.
I am not alone.

Runner Up, *Ascent Aspirations*
Anthology Five contest, 2008.
Sapphire Seasons, Aelous House, 2010.

As One Cradles Pain

My depression is a page in your book.

Words flow into nights of rivers
and dark passages
written long ago.

I turn the page,
find you between the lines.

You cradle me
as one cradles pain.

I try to find solace.

Silence alters the volume,
entombed in black and white.

The anti-climax is my spine –
a blighted column
hollow and sharp.

Eyes ghost the page,
in the dark
the book feels eternally safe.

Runner Up, *Ascent Aspirations* anthology contest, 2012.
*In A Wintered Nes*t, Serengeti Press, 2013.

Memory and Loss
For my Mother

She watches the light fade
while the front door of her mind
rehearses opening and closing.

Dead people resurface,
tenacious on empty days,
retreat into shine.

With a certain touch,
murmurs emerge like static.
The response is immediate.

Voices illuminate corners
where her mind wafts
what it cannot draft.

Now dignity wears a tattered dress,
white, then gray,
smothered in a coffin.
Her memory erodes to dust.

Memory and Loss, A Canadian Anthology
of Poetry, Ink Bottle Press, 2016.

Making Macaroni and Cheese

~ in memory of three friends who died from cancer

I remember making macaroni and cheese
while Marilyn stood in the doorway like a movie star
holding her divorce papers
in front of the mirror
thanking her public for the Oscar
in her new expensive size 9 gown.

The stove was on high,
the element bright,
steam arose like a tulip,
water blossomed
into tiny bubbles.

Rhondi whispered she was pregnant.
I whispered I was too.

Long, long, ago,
we both refused a free trip to Miami Beach
from a drunk in an Armani suit.

Lolly had a party and invited all her friends,
gathered in an oval crown;
coral and jade were sung out loud.
The evening turned to wine
within me
no one knew I was pregnant,
stirring the macaroni around.

I called Marilyn, Rhondi and Lolly
when the macaroni was cooked;
a great hunger for warm orange
spread over heavy silence.

Rise Up Singing anthology, London Abused Women's Centre, 2002.
Sapphire Seasons, Aeolus House, 2010.

All the Time

Noisy newspapers
colour khaki terrors.

Someone else prefers darkness,
a closed door.

Remains unlisted.

All the time,
language of hate explodes
on crowded buses,
in busy cafes
in front of nursery schools.

Fanatic ideals martyred

while someone else sits back,
enjoys a glass of wine, a fine dinner
and firmly believes
they are perfectly safe
in suburbia.

Runner Up. *Ascent Aspirations*
anthology contest, 2014.

Mary-Beth

Becky had a dolly
she'd hold and rock and sing.
She always kept it with her.
It was her favourite thing.

They'd play house together
and include the family dog.
It was a purebred Doberman.
His name was Pollywog.

One day Pollywog took the dolly
out in the yard to play.
Becky was at school.
She went for half a day.

The dog chewed up the dolly
and then ripped off her head.
Becky cried and cried
when she found her dolly dead.

Pollywog was taken
to the pound and put to death
'cause Becky's favourite dolly
was her sister, Mary-Beth.

After the Rain, Snowapple Press, 2000.
Runner Up, *Ascent Aspirations* anthology contest, 2014.

Pluck

I am visiting my childhood memories
green as tomatoes in May
stalked until they are red
and plucked like roses.

I consider how un-red life would be
without teeth and hands and arteries.

We would all squat
like dandelions on endless fields
and the tomatoes would be white
like summer clouds
in the heart of the sky.

I close my eyes and come back
down-to-earth,
spreading seeds to fashion far-flung fantasies
in my lackadaisical life.

Everyone needs a little pluck now and then.

Runner Up, The *Arborealis* Prize For Poetry, 2012.

Bedtime Chimera

I prefer the box in youthful spring.
Like a perfect prefect,
I am in charge.

Long lost whimsy is the festive foundation.
Minor posture's bent on raucous revelry
induced by the single size.

I jump
at the chance to spread
joyous reveries.

Two extended callused feet dangle.
Symmetrical moments bring out the child,
visualize familiarity
at a slumber party
just for one.

Runner Up, The *Arborealis* Prize for Poetry, 2010.

All Day

Stranded over cobblestones
under smoke scented skies
tiny troubles inhale, swallow, exhale,
make a blank climate.

The continuous prison crumbles
in clay.

A kind of guilt
must always be loved
a little
like a pet dog
requires attention.

Frantic worry fills my head.
Quiet noise filters through flesh.
There is a different ring,
not strong or thick,

just *there*
all day
soft and malleable,
changed slightly, peculiar
suddenly mute and somehow
paradise I can never taste.

Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine, 2004.

Air Show

Mid-afternoon
mid-January
mid-sky

a host of Starlings frolic
on a dull grey cloud-scape

The bird-ensemble
unfurl wings
like black orchids blooming

joyfully coast
back-and-forth
dance-on-air
in formation
fashion
rings and hearts

over the inter-section
at Finch-and-Yonge
entertaining a crowd
of cars

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I.B. (Bunny) Iskov is the Founder of The Ontario Poetry Society. Her poetry has been published in several literary journals and anthologies. In 2009, Bunny was the recipient of the inaugural *R.A.V.E. Award* (Recognizing Arts Vaughan Excellence) in recognition of outstanding contribution to the cultural landscape of the City of Vaughan as Art Educator / Mentor in the Literary Arts. Bunny's latest collection, "Skirting the Edge" was published by IOWI in 2015. In 2017, Bunny received the Absolutely Fabulous Women Award for women over 40, for her contribution to the literary arts in the Golden Horseshoe.

Witty, quirky, sometimes surrealistic, I.B. Iskov's poems will reward readers dissatisfied with easy grooves. They offer a vision that is fresh, piquant, and multi-enriched with humour, imaginative daring, and genuine concern.
-- Allan Briesmaster, Author of *Against the Flight of Spring* and *River Neither*

My Coming of Age expresses poet I.B. Iskov's personal, yet universal, exploration in poetry of that dimension transcending events, revealing the fierce and conflicting, sometimes bitter yet beautiful, confrontations with inescapable truths of existence. From The Trucker on the 401 to Bedtime Chimera, Bunny bravely rips aside the contrived coverings of these events to reveal what we must all accept as we mature into revelation.
-- Katherine L. Gordon, Poet, Publisher, Author, Judge and Reviewer

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